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Eight Hours for Work. By JOHN RAE, M.A. London and New York, Macmillan & Co., 1894. — 340 pp.

For three-quarters of a century the demand for a shorter working day has been a prominent phase of the labor movement. It has been advocated for all sorts of reasons. It has been generally opposed by the employing class, and until recently by economists. The chief ground of opposition has been that to reduce the working hours would diminish the *per diem* product, and consequently increase the cost of production and diminish profits. Although it is true that the output per laborer is greater to-day with ten hours than it was in 1820 with fourteen hours, the capitalists refuse to believe that to reduce the working day to eight hours would not lessen the output per laborer. In short, they refuse to believe that, other things remaining the same, eight hours' work will equal ten hours' work. Consequently, we find among employers a willingness to reduce the hours of labor only if the laborers will agree to a proportionate reduction in wages.

Mr. Rae has assumed the task of proving that the reduction of the hours of labor will not reduce the output, insisting that the laborers' productive capacity will increase directly as their working day is shortened. He says (page 13):

The question of questions, therefore, in connection with any proposed further reduction of the hours of labor is the question of the probable effect of the change on the personal efficiency of the work people. If short hours mean short product, they would mean short profits and short wages too.

He very properly makes much of Robert Owen's experiment at New Lanark, where the working day was reduced in three installments from sixteen to ten and a half hours. In such instances the effect would be very much as Mr. Rae contends, because the working day was then so long that the last three or four hours' labor was performed under conditions of increasing physical exhaustion. The proof of this was amply set forth in the testimony before the Parliamentary committees from 1815 to 1845, where the overseers testified that it was necessary to whip children to prevent their going to sleep and falling into the machinery. Wherever the length of the day is such as to compel laborers to continue work after physical exhaustion begins, a reduction of the hours of labor will be followed by some increase in the average hourly output. This, of course, is what took place in all the reductions in the hours of labor in the first half of

the century in England, and in nearly all reductions up to date on the continent and in some states in America.

But this does not justify the assumption that the same relative increase of product per hour will follow a reduction from ten hours to eight. If the doctrine were true that the laborer would, by an increase of his activity, augment the product directly as the day is shortened, there would be no real advantage in shortening the working day, because a reduction in the hours would simply mean a proportional increase of the pressure upon the laborer. If there is any good reason for reducing the hours of labor at all, it is to lighten the burden of labor. To deny that is to take away the economic and social importance of the short-hour movement. The real economic improvement of society consists not in making laborers do more in a shorter time by working harder, but in enabling them, through the application of science in improved methods, to produce more in a shorter day with less exertion.

The fault of Mr. Rae's book is his evident disposition to minimize the influence of machinery and quite perceptibly to exaggerate the effect of increased personal effort on the part of the laborers. Thus in referring to the greatly increased product per laborer in the cotton industry of Lancashire, he says: "More than three-fourths of the whole came from closer attention and greater accuracy of work on the part of operatives." To any one at all familiar with the history of cotton manufacture this is an obvious overstatement. For instance, until the introduction of the weft-fork, which was not until late in the fifties, a weaver could mind only two looms, and those running at the low speed of probably sixty or seventy picks per minute. After the introduction of the weft-fork, which stopped the loom whenever the filling thread broke, and thus saved a great deal of turning back and readjustment, three and four looms became the rule for men and some women in Lancashire, and instead of sixty or seventy picks a minute, many looms now run at the rate of one hundred to one hundred and twenty. Thus, the number of looms which a person can mind and their rate of speed have been nearly doubled, not by the increased dexterity of the weavers, but by improved machinery. In further proof of this, the men weavers in the United States mind eight looms, and women six and sometimes eight. Mr. Rae would hardly claim that this is due to the greater intelligence and dexterity of the American weavers over the English, since the very weavers who are minding six and eight looms in Fall River, Lawrence, Holyoke and Cohoes are chiefly English and Irish. The

weavers who could mind only four looms in Lancashire can mind eight in Massachusetts. This shows that it is the economic conditions of the factory and not the physical quality of the man that makes the difference.

If we turn to purely hand labor, the error underlying Mr. Rae's contention is more obvious. On page 177, in a complaining tone, he quotes a master builder as saying :

Where it used to be the custom for a good bricklayer to lay a thousand bricks a day, three hundred or four hundred is about the usual thing now. The cost of labor has increased from forty shillings a rod, which it was thirty-five years ago, to eighty shillings or ninety shillings now.

Mr. Rae severely censures the bricklayers for not laying as many bricks now as formerly. But why this great difference between bricklayers and factory operatives? Are bricklayers a distinctly more shiftless class than factory operatives? If this were admitted, it would be fatal to Mr. Rae's whole contention, which is "that the higher the wages the greater the intelligence, and the greater the intelligence the greater the dexterity and activity of the laborers." Bricklayers everywhere receive nearly double the wages of factory operatives, and hence ought to show a greater increase in productive power with the shortened day; but, as everybody knows, they do not show this.

Economically, Mr. Rae is really very much in the same position as are Edward Atkinson and Mr. Schoenhof regarding the question of labor cost in America. They argue that, because in the long run high wages give a low cost of production, a diminished labor cost must immediately follow a rise in wages. This conclusion is entirely false, as Mr. Rae's facts conclusively show. On the strength of this error they have advocated free trade in America, asserting that the higher wages here necessarily create a proportionately greater personal efficiency of labor and hence a lower cost of production — an assertion which practical men know is not true.

There is, of course, some truth in Mr. Rae's claim regarding the hours of labor, as there is in the Atkinson-Schoenhof claim, but the influence of this fact is very slight, and diminishes after a certain degree of proficiency has been reached. The error in both cases is in attributing the increased productive power to the wrong factor. It is generally true that in the long run the product per day has increased as the hours of labor have been reduced; it is also true that wages have increased with the shorter working day; but it is

not true that the individual exertion of the laborer has increased as the hours diminished and wages advanced. On the contrary, the great fact of this century is that it is the increased use of capital in various forms that has increased the *per capita* product and made possible a shorter day, higher wages, easier work, cheaper products and greater profits.

It should be kept prominently in the foreground that the primary object of reducing the hours of labor is not to benefit capitalists, but to improve the condition of laborers by making each day's drudgery a little less, and each day's social enjoyment a little greater. The social elevation of the masses is of itself an all-sufficient reason for shortening the working day or changing any other industrial or social institution. The question of the output belongs to the capitalist side of the situation. It is his economic function to see that in various ways sufficient new economies are introduced to keep up and even to increase the output. And this is what has always occurred in a greater or less degree.

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Die Arbeitsverfassung der Englischen Kolonien in Nord-Amerika.

VON A. SARTORIUS VON WALTERSHAUSEN. Strasburg, Karl J. Trübner, 1894. — xv, 232 pp.

In writing this book the author had avowedly three ends in view: first, to present a general picture of the legal and actual position of the common laborer in the thirteen English colonies; second, to bring to light the real connection between the several systems of labor — indentured servants, wage-earners and slaves; and, finally, to prove that it was really the different forms of production and exchange growing up in the colonies that moulded these three labor systems into their final form.

On the whole the work is well done. Rather too much space, from the American standpoint, is devoted at the outset to describing the exact location and early development of the colonies. The system of indentured servitude is then very clearly explained from the standpoint of both the master and the apprentice. The causes for the slight development of the wage-system in these early days are also satisfactorily set forth.

Professor von Waltershausen's account of the Mercantile System and its effect upon the institution of slavery in the colonies will strike